

Strengthened on the Journey by Christ

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation today is the Epistle lesson of Colossians chapter two verses six to nineteen.

Boys and Girls, I pray that you are doing well this morning. Have you ever heard of philosophy? It tries to answer the deep questions of human existence, such as, “What is the meaning of life?” and “What is the nature of the universe?” The answers to these questions are so varied and contradictory, usually very long, complicated, and are filled with big words. After forcing myself to read a number of large books on philosophy, I almost always end up saying, “Wow! That sounds impressive. I wonder what it means.”

Most people are philosophers, but not very deep. I don't deal with hard questions. Simple ones are enough to tax my mind. For example, I wonder, “When they ship Styrofoam, what do they pack it in?” I wonder, “Is it true that cannibals don't eat clowns, because they taste funny?” I wonder, “Why do they call the slacks I'm wearing a *pair* of pants, when there's only one.” In the past, I've agonized about other matters. I have wondered how they get deer to cross at those yellow signs. I've wondered, “If corn oil comes from corn, where does baby oil come from?” These are hard questions for me. Maybe they bother you, too. We philosophers wonder about a lot of things. Today, we will hear about how Jesus answers all of our questions about life. How does He do that? Ponder that question as you hear the rest of the

sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

Pay Attention to Faith

Today, I also wonder about something else. I wonder why many people don't pay more attention to their faith. Last week I went grocery shopping. In the produce aisle, I saw shoppers thumping watermelons. They wanted the best watermelon possible. I saw people going through the piles of strawberries. One after another, the red fruits were examined for depth of color, soft spots, and size. It looked like the shoppers were buying diamonds. Why did they go to the trouble? They wanted the best strawberries or melon for the dinner table.

After the produce section, I ambled over to the meat department. What I saw was scary: people bent over, with their heads in the cooler, concentrating on the different packages of meat. As I watched, steaks and roasts were tossed from one pile to another as the shoppers searched for the ultimate hunk of beef or pork. I didn't dare get close to the bacon section.

The philosopher in me asked why people who ponder long and hard over the differences between watermelons don't pause to consider the truth about God and eternal life. I had to ask myself, "Why do so many people spend hours searching for what they will eat and drink, and yet hardly spend a moment seeking the kingdom of God?" (Mt 6:31, 33).

Some people don't care about fruits and vegetables, but watch them when it's time to shop for a car. They go from dealer to dealer to dealer comparing a vehicle's lines and tire

size and engines and options and prices. They haggle endlessly for a better price, looking for the ultimate deal. Strategy is only slightly less complex than that for the D-day landing at Normandy. Why? Because they want to hit the streets saying, “Yes, I just bought it. Gets 204 miles to the gallon—in city traffic. Doesn’t need a tune-up until the odometer turns a million miles. Price? Dirt cheap, if you know what you’re doing. I traded in my old jalopy and gave them ten bucks extra.” Shoppers want the best deal possible. I can understand that. But I wonder when I see some of these same people spending so little time thinking about God. God grants a treasure which, unlike a car, cannot be stolen or rust (Mt 6:20). The philosopher in me wonders why a person who believes car dealerships are different maintains that all gods are alike.

Are There Differences?

The philosopher in me wonders why some people believe there is a difference in schools but think that all religions are alike? Scripture is clear: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Prov 9:10). Why do we argue incessantly about political candidates and parties, but think that any belief in any kind of god can save us? (Acts 4:12). Why do some people think there are differences between perfumes, underarm deodorants, soaps, shampoos, razor blades, beer, and fast food places, but think all gods are alike? (Dan 3:29) The philosopher in me wonders. Apparently God wonders too. That’s why, by the Spirit’s direction, Saint Paul encouraged Christians to live in Jesus, to be rooted and built up in him, to be strengthened in the faith as they had been taught (Col 2:6–7).

As philosophers, we may wonder about a lot of things in life, but we don't have to wonder about what God tells us. He says we should reject fake philosophies. He tells us to be faithful (Col 2:8). This is not a new message. In the Old Testament, God called his people to faithfulness (Deut 5:1). He warned of the dangers that would come if they wandered away (Josh 23:16). He recorded the destruction of Judah when it deserted his covenant (1 Chr 9:1). God's call to faithfulness was echoed by the New Testament evangelists and apostles who remind us, "There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). We don't have to wonder what God wants from his people. He wants us to be faithful.

Are All Gods the Same?

In the days of the Old Testament, people debated whose "god" was greatest. Times have changed. Nowadays, the devil gets great delight in promoting the idea that all "gods" are the same. He encourages people to believe that Buddha, Allah, and all the other "gods" humankind has invented, are just different names for the same divine being. Satan tells us it's fashionable to be open minded when it comes to religion. It sounds so modern, so broad minded, so sophisticated, so in tune with the times to say: "Religion is just a matter of opinion." For many, "As long as you believe in something and live a good life, isn't that enough?"

But I wonder about this open mindedness. God didn't accept open mindedness from Abraham (Gen 17:7). He didn't accept open mindedness from the children of Israel after he delivered them from Egypt (Ex 6:7). Jesus did not promote open mindedness when he walked among us. He insisted that we were to worship only the triune God (Lk

4:8). As a philosopher, I wonder why the unchanging God would change his tune? Why would he allow 20th century people to create new gods in their own image? I wonder why people are open minded about God, but are not open minded about medicine. No one goes to a doctor and says, “Give me any old medicine for my illness.” No, we want a specific medicine for a particular malady. We don’t want the doctor to treat diabetes with penicillin or strep throat with insulin. If there is no room for open mindedness in medicine, why should we accept the devil’s idea of open mindedness when it comes to a generic god?

As a philosopher, I wonder why we should be open minded about God when we are not open minded about our children’s education. When we send our little ones off to school, we don’t want them to learn that $2+2=3$ (or worse still, $2+2 = \text{whatever you want}$). We want them to know the answer is 4. Any other answer is unacceptable. We aren’t open minded when our children come home reporting that Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1942.

Similarly, we dare not be open minded when the devil tells us that all gods are alike. We need to see through hollow and deceptive philosophies that depend on human and worldly traditions. We need to remember that our Lord is absolutely unique. Because he is unique, he is not ashamed to command: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut 6:5). These commandments should be impressed on our children. We should talk about them when we sit at home and when we walk along the road, when we lie down and when we get up. They should be written on the door frames of our houses and on our gates (Deut 6:6–9). There is no room for open

mindedness here. Right is right; truth is truth. And if all the forces of hell and the combined voices of humanity say otherwise, they are wrong. Our God is true and unique.

Jesus Reveals His Father

The philosopher in us cannot fathom the reality of this God. The philosopher in us cannot comprehend the truth of his Word, his righteousness, his holiness, his majesty. We are by nature, you see, fallen philosophers, trapped in our sinfulness and unable to attain the true knowledge of God. We need someone to enlighten us, to reveal God in all his divine fullness—his righteousness, holiness, and majesty, and also all his compassion, his kindness, his mercy. Only one teacher, sent from God, can show us the Father in all his grace.

During the Civil War, a soldier whose brother and father had been killed went to Washington D.C. to see President Lincoln. He wanted a release which would allow him to go home and take over spring planting. When he got to the White House, he tried every way imaginable to see the president. At every avenue, he was turned down. Discouraged, he wandered from the presidential mansion to a little park across the street. While he sat, a boy came up to him and said, “You look unhappy. What’s wrong?” The soldier told his hopeless story. Immediately, the lad took the soldier by the hand, led him around to the back of the White House, through the back door, past the guards, past the generals, past the government officials, directly to the president’s office. The little boy didn’t knock, but walked right in, saying, “Daddy, this soldier needs to talk to you.” In a short time, the soldier was headed home for spring planting. No other boy could have done what the president’s

son did. He alone could open the door which would guarantee a happy ending.

That is what Jesus does. God's Son *alone* can grant a happy ending. The Son of God, alone, by his life, death, and resurrection has opened doors that no pretend divinity could. In our walk through life, he is our truth. In our weakness, he is our Savior who richly forgives us. In our walk through hardship and adversity, Jesus is our Lord who equips us and steadies us with his own strength.

We don't have to be philosophers, we don't have to wonder or worry, to know this is God's truth which needs to be shared by the members of Peace, Christ Deaf or First. In April 1988, the evening news reported that a skydiving photographer had jumped from a plane along with numerous other jumpers. His responsibility was to film the group as they fell. His camera showed the wind whipping the clothes of the divers. It recorded the intricate designs that the divers made as they came together. The film displayed one parachute after another opening up. Then the screen went wild. The news said the cameraman died. In the excitement of the moment, he had jumped out of the plane without his chute. It wasn't until he reached for the rip cord that he realized his problem. Until then, the jump had been exciting and fun. At that moment things changed. Faith in a nonexistent parachute could not help him. Someday, an open minded world will understand that story. Today they are having fun. They are free-falling through life. But, without Jesus, they are trusting in a parachute that is not there.

I wonder, on Judgment Day, just how sad can a lost soul be? Christian friends, let's not find out; we don't want to know. If we saw a person jumping from a plane without a

parachute, we'd say something to that person, wouldn't we? If that's the case, how much more should we witness to those who are free-falling through life without the protection of a Savior? Let's put aside the philosophies and pretenses of being open minded. Let us be bold in our witness and say to the world: "Jesus alone is Savior." Let us warn: "Do not be taken captive through philosophy, human tradition, and the basic principles of this world." Let us encourage the world to: "Live in Jesus. Be rooted in Jesus. Be strengthened in Jesus who has triumphed on our behalf." Let us tell all who will listen, "You don't have to wonder. Jesus alone is Savior and Lord" (Col 2:6–15).

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.